

Icebreakers for Training, Meetings, and Other Events

Icebreakers are activities that are undertaken at the beginning of an exercise to help people feel at ease.

Icebreakers serve many functions: to "warm up" the group; get the members involved with one another; get the members communicating with each other in an informal way; and get members' brains "back into action" or rejuvenated after breaks or meals.

When a trainer first walks into a group, participants **may not react favorably**.

Ice Breakers can help:

- Participants **relax**, be more responsive, and **participate more positively**.
- Participants **get to know** each other
- **Relieve the initial tension** that is to be expected among a new group of people.
- Set the stage the training will be **participatory**

A good icebreaker should meet the following criteria:

- Minimal time: take an average of 5 to 20 minutes to complete
- Active: require all attendees to participate as active members of the group
- Creative: require members to solve a problem, answer a question, perform mental or physical gymnastics, etc.
- Simple to implement: don't require prior substantive knowledge, or a lot of setup, materials or supplies

10 Ways to HOOK the participants: A hook is used right at the start of the session to hook the participants – to let them know this won't just be a lecture but interactive

- Question
- Provocative Fact or Statistic
- Exercise (mental or physical)
- Critical Incident (an actual situation)
- Amusing Anecdote
- Sentence Completion
- Analogy/Metaphor/Simile
- Quotation that Provokes Thoughts and Feelings
- Demonstration

Energizers are activities used to stimulate and motivate participants during training sessions

Things to consider when using energizers:

- Use energizers whenever **people look sleepy** or tired or to create a natural break between activities.
- Select activities where **everyone can participate**. Some activities may exclude people with disabilities.
- Try not to use only competitive activities, but also include ones that **encourage team building**.
- Try to avoid energizers that go on too long. **Keep them short**, and move to next planned activity

When to Use Icebreakers and Energizers

The best times to use icebreakers are the following:

- Pre-event socializers: when the group is meeting for the first time, to get members to meet and become acquainted with one another--social warm-ups
- Morning openers: to get an event off to a positive (and fun) start, to stress the values of the group--openness, candor, friendliness, support, etc.
- After lunch wakeups: to help the group transition back into the meeting/learning environment
- Rejuvenation energizers: when the group is fading, getting bored, or overloaded with information
- Calming dissension or tension relievers: when the group seems to be coming apart at the seams, break the stress

Things to Consider When Choosing Types of Icebreakers and Energizers

- How much time you have: most icebreakers are short but some may require more time; reporting out and discussing the lessons learned adds to the time
- Size of the group: some icebreakers work best in small groups; others require more people
- Room setup: the size and format of the room may influence which icebreakers you use. For example, a room set up in a boardroom style limits movement versus a large ballroom set up in rounds
- Need for supplies/materials: make sure you have what you need—paper, flipcharts, tape, 3x5 cards, etc. Make sure the venue allows you to pin/tape charts/signs to the wall
- Small prizes: people like to “win” and get recognized with small prizes

And Other Experiential Exercises

From the Electronic Discussion on Group Facilitation

www.albany.edu/cpr/gf/

The Dynamics of an Ice Breaker

Date: Thu, 1 Mar 2001 10:17:27 +0100

From: Jon Jenkins <jon@imaginal.nl>

To: GRP-FACL@listserv.albany.edu

Subject: Re: [GF] Ice Breaker/Introduction For Large Group

Here is part of an outline of a lecture I give about openings.

The Dynamics of an Ice Breaker

The dynamic of an Ice Breaker is to satisfy participants' needs to establish an appropriate social relationship with other participants and with the facilitators, and preview the style and content of the meeting.

A. At the very beginning of a program every participant is insecure about other participants and his or her place in the group.

1. They want to be acknowledge in some appropriate way. They want to be invited into the group.
2. They expect an appropriate level of respect.
3. People need to understand what is going on and how they fit is dealt with in an ice breaker.
4. The vast majority of people want to be liked.

B. By using an ice breaker you provide people with the opportunity to send and receive messages to and about other people.

1. People are able to observe each other in a controlled situation.
2. An ice breaker gives people a chance to exchange names etc. in a structured way.
3. Participants have an opportunity to observe others and to be observed.
4. Participants then put on an appropriate role in relationship to their own self image and their image of the other participants.

C. The normal structure of getting acquainted would take too long and perhaps create a set relationships that was not appropriate to the meeting or program.

1. The role of the facilitator is established during the ice breaker.
2. The role of the participant is created during the ice breaker.
3. The room in which the course or program is established as a meeting space.

4. The participants are enabled to establish initial relationships appropriate to the program.

D. The style of the ice breaker informs the participants what kind of program they will be participating in.

1. The ice breaker creates images of what kind of program is being facilitated, what is important in the program and what kinds of roles are expected from the participants.
2. The content of the program is suggested by the content of the ice breaker.
3. The style of the facilitator in leading an ice breaker is to enable the participants to relax to feel at ease with the task at hand.
4. In general, the style of the facilitator is one of respect for the group and the individuals in it.

Trainer's Tool 1.1: Options for Ice Breakers

Opener or Ice Breaker

1. Lifelines

Purpose: To help participants get to know each other.

Time Required: 20 – 30 minutes

Materials Required: Flip chart paper and markers

Description: Ask participants to draw a line on a piece of flip chart paper turned sideways. If needed, they may use additional paper. At one end is their date of birth. Along the line participants should record the important events in their life that shaped the person they have become today. The events may be personal, professional, or simply interesting.

After each participant completes their "lifeline" they should explain it to the group.

2. What's Your Name?

Purpose: To help participants and the trainer learn each other's name.

Time Required: 15-20 minutes

Materials Required: None

Description: Ask each participant to introduce themselves to the group by giving their name and one unusual thing about themselves. For example, "My name is Elizabeth and I drove a tank." The next person repeats the name and information about the first person and adds his or her own name and fact. Each person follows the same procedure, recalling all of the names and facts.

3. Shout, Whisper, Sing

Purpose: To help participants remember new names.

Time Required: 10 minutes

Materials Required: None

Description:

- Ask participants to stand in a circle.
- Explain that you are going to call out someone's name as you cross the circle towards him or her. The person whose name you called should then take your place in the center of the circle.
- The person who is now in the center should call out someone else's name and that person moves to the center.
- When your name is called again, continue the game, but this time everyone must whisper the person's name.
- Finally when your name is called out again, continue the game, but this time everyone must sing the person's name.

4. The Interview

Purpose: To introduce participants and learn something about them.

Time Required: 20-30 minutes

Materials Required: Pen and paper for note taking

Description: Ask participants to choose a partner they don't know.

- Give 5 minutes for each person to interview his/her partner. Instruct them to find out as much about their partner as possible. Notes may be taken.
- After the interviews ask each person to introduce their partner to the rest of the group.

Note: This introduction works best when the group is less than 20 people.

5. The Cocktail Party

Purpose: For larger groups to get acquainted with as many people in the group as possible.

Time Required: This is up to the trainer. Each introduction takes 1 minute.

Materials Required: None

Description: Ask person to introduce themselves to someone and spend a minute learning about each other.

- After 1 minute, ask everyone to find a new person to get acquainted with for 1 minute.
- Continue changing every minute as long as you have time. The longer you spend at the exercise the more people each person will met.

6. Common Ground

Purpose: This introduction works for small groups, especially for a small group working as a team. It also works well when there are several small groups that make up a larger group.

Time Required: 10-15 minutes

Materials Required: Pen and paper

Description: Instruct each group to list everything they can find that they have in common. Give them a time limit (5 minutes or so) and tell them to avoid the obvious things like, we are all in this workshop, etc.

- Ask each group to assign one person to write down the things the group has in common.
- When the time is up, ask each group to read the things on their list.

7. Who is Who?

Purpose: To help participants and the trainer to learn something about each other. It works best when people already know each other, at least by name.

Time Required: 20 minutes

Materials Required: A slip of paper for each participant and a bowl

Description:

- Hand out a slip of paper to each participant.
- Ask each participant to write several things about themselves that would help other participants recognize them such as tall, thin, hair, glasses, etc.
- Ask participants to fold the slips of paper and put them into a bowl.
- Ask each participant to pick a slip of paper from the bowl.
- One at a time, ask participants to identify the person described on their slip of paper.

8. Catch the Ball!

Purpose: To help participants learn each others names.

Time Required: 30 minutes

Materials Required: A ball, preferably large and easy to catch

Description:

- Have participants form a circle.
- Begin the exercise by throwing the ball to someone else in the circle.
- The person who catches the ball must name the person who threw it.
- The person who caught the ball throws it to another person who names him or her and the game continues.

Variation: With small groups it is possible for each person who catches the ball to recite the names of all the people who have already thrown the ball.

9. Pass the Fruit

Purpose: To help participants learn something about each other.

Time Required: 20 minutes depending on the size of the group

Materials Required: A piece of fruit big enough for participants to pass to each other without using their hands.

Description:

- Arrange participants in a circle.
- Give the first person a piece of fruit and ask hi or her to pass the fruit to the next person without using his or her hands.

10. Two Truths and a Lie

Purpose: To help participants who already know each other get to know more about each other.

Time Required: 12- 30 minutes, depending on the number of participants

Materials Required: One small prize

Description:

- Each participant should first give their name and designation and then tell the rest of the group 3 interesting things about themselves. The facts should be things the rest of the participants are not likely to know.
- The group has to decide which piece of information is the lie.
- After everyone has introduced themselves and their lie, ask the group to vote on the best or most imaginative lie.
- Give the person who wins a small prize.

11. Two Loves and One Hate

Purpose: To help participants who already know each other get to know more about each other.

Time Required: 12- 30 minutes, depending on the number of participants

Materials Required: One small prize

Description:

- Ask participants to write down 2 things they really love and 1 thing they really hate on a piece of paper. Encourage participants to write unusual things, not ordinary everyday things.
- Instruct participants to put their paper face down and not show other participants.
- Ask each person to take a turn reading their 2 loves and 1 hate to the rest of the group. Participants should present each item by saying "The first thing I love or hate is-----"
- Ask the rest of the group to guess which things the person loves and what is the one thing the person hates. At the same time the person tells the things they love and hate, they should also briefly introduce themselves to the other participants.
- At the end of the exercise ask participant to vote on who had the most interesting or outrageous "hate" and give him or her a prize.

12. Mix and Match

Purpose: To match up participants for mutual introductions.

Time Required: 30 minutes

Materials: Whatever you use, you will need one for each pair of participants. You may use holiday greeting cards or IE&C, or BCC material related to the course.

Description:

- Collect the holiday greeting cards or IE&C or BCC material you have decided to use.
- If you use greeting cards, cut off everything except the first page with the picture on it. Whatever you use, you will need one picture for each pair of participants. Each pair should have a different picture if possible.
- Cut each picture in half. If you don't have a different picture for each pair of participants, then cut the pictures in half in different ways.
- Distribute one half of a picture to each participant.
- Instruct participants to mix with each other until they find the person holding the other half of their picture.
- When they find a partner, each person should find out enough interesting information about their partner to introduce their partner to the rest of the group.
- Gather the group together and have each pair introduce their partner to the rest of the group.

13. The Walking Billboard

Purpose: To provide an interesting way of having a new group of participants mix with each other and share information about themselves.

Time Required: 30 minutes

Materials Required: A half of a piece of flip chart paper for each participant, masking tape, markers for each participant

Description:

- Ask participants to think of someut themselves.
- Now, ask them to take their flip chart paper and attach it to their back or shoulders using masking tape.
- Ask them to walk around the room and discover who everyone is.

14. Self-Disclosure

Purpose: To introduce participants to each other. This is useful as an opening exercise for participants who already know each other.

Time Required: Two minutes for each person

Materials: None

Description:

- Ask each person to take two items from their purse or pocket. Suggest that they take out things that are important to them for some reason or another.
- Ask each person to introduce themselves and explain why the item is important to them.

Note: You can also relate this exercise to a specific training. For example, ask "How does this item relate to you as a potential trainer?"

13. Warm Ups and Energisers

The use of warm up exercises and energisers is a contentious issue, and one that requires consideration. People either like them, or find them a waste of time. If they are to be used, the selection of exercises requires thought, especially if training in, or with, different cultures. Trainers in training should be given experience of warm up exercises and energisers, so that they can learn when and how to use them. Feedback on how well or how badly they worked is also important.

One problem with energisers is that they can eat into the time of a course. Trainers in training need to recognise that the best way to keep participants energised and engaged is to ensure that the sessions themselves are participatory and interesting! Time spent on energisers should therefore be short and active, or have an important function, such as helping participants to get to know one another at the beginning of a course.

Examples of warm-ups and energisers include:

The World is Distant

Pick a question and ask people to stand up if they agree with it. Example:

- Is alcohol a problem in the world? (If you agree, stay standing)
- Is alcohol a problem in this country? (If you agree, stay standing)
- Is alcohol a problem in this city? (If you agree, stay standing)
- Is alcohol a problem in this room? (If you agree, stay standing)

This exercise helps people to relate global issues to their local situation.

Two Truths, One Lie

Break everyone into groups of between 3 and 5 persons. Each person in the group must tell the others two truths and one lie about themselves. The other members of the group must then guess which statement was the lie. When finished, the groups can choose their best 'liar', who can then try and fool the rest of the groups.

This exercise helps people to realise how difficult it is to know a person just from external appearance and from what they say.

Name Game

This is a 'get to know you' game. Groups of about 10 persons are formed. The person who starts must say his/her name, as well as a word that starts with the same letter as the first letter of the name. The trainer could give a specific topic for the additional word, such as food or vegetables. The second person must give the name and additional word of the person before, as well as their own name and additional word, and so on until everyone in the group has said their own name and the names of everyone else.

For example, if the first person is called Karen and the second person is called Scott, then Karen might say 'Kiwi Karen', and the second person would say 'Kiwi Karen', and might add 'Scallion Scott'.

This exercise helps people to remember each other's names, and creates a fun atmosphere. It is difficult to do with a large group.

Movement Game

Each person picks a movement for themselves, for example, putting out their right arm. The person next to them has to imitate that movement, and create their own movement. The next person has to repeat both the earlier movements and make their own movement, and so on.

Country on Forehead

Everyone has a sticker on their forehead with the name of a country. The person does not know what country is named on their own sticker. The participants must then ask questions of each other, to which the only answer can be 'yes' or 'no', and try to guess which country they have on their forehead.

This exercise helps people to get to know each other and to feel comfortable in each other's presence.

Blindfold Game

Participants are divided into pairs, and one of the pair has a blindfold over their eyes. The other one has to lead the blindfolded person around the room and around obstacles in the room, such as tables, chairs, flipchart. After 5 minutes, the couple change roles, and the leader becomes the blindfolded person.

After the exercise, discuss with the participants how they felt during the exercise.

The aim of this exercise is to help people to trust each other, and also to help participants to realise what it is like to be in a vulnerable situation. Care should be taken in using this exercise as some people find it very uncomfortable, and become resistant to learning.

Training the

Trainer Guide

A variation on this exercise is for one of the pair to be blindfolded, and have to draw a picture (for example of a child or a house) following the directions of their partner. This exercise can be more acceptable to participants, as it feels less physically threatening.

Interview Game

Each person pairs off with one other and asks several questions. Then, having learnt something of each other, each partner introduces the other to the whole group. Some leading questions might be:

- When you hear the phrase "a human right," what do you think about?
- What animal best represents you?
- What event in your life has most affected your view of the world?
- What brought you here?
- What do you like most about your job?

This is an exercise for introductions and helps people to understand each other.

Snowball

This is a game that asks for spontaneous responses from participants. It can be used for a quick evaluation, or to throw up ideas quickly. Make a ball out of paper. Call out your own opinion or idea, and then throw the ball to another participant, who then has to call out his/her opinion or idea before throwing to the next person. For example 'At the end of this day's training I am feeling.....' or 'One thing I learnt today.....'

